

You Belong Here

Strategic Plan
2025–2027



Belong To LGBTQ+
Youth Ireland





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Message from the Chairperson and CEO

At Belong To, we have been working with and for LGBTQ+ young people in Ireland since 2003. For over two decades, we have been unwavering in our commitment to our mission – to work with and for LGBTQ+ young people to create a society where we all belong.

While our dedication and passion has remained steadfast, the external landscape has shifted considerably, and more dramatically than ever during our last 2022-2024 Strategic Plan.

Anti-LGBTQ+ hate crime and hate speech, particularly related to trans people, is on the rise. We have seen this in news headlines and reports about violent attacks and assaults motivated by hate. In Ireland, LGBTQ+ organisations and groups have experienced protests and disruptions at local libraries and Pride events – anti-democratic tactics used around the world. The area of education has become a battleground as anti-LGBTQ+ actors show fierce resistance to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ identities in the curriculum.

During these times, when our courage is tested and we face attacks on our day-to-day work, we lean into our values, our strong team and our collective dedication to continue to be there for LGBTQ+ youth.

In the coming years, we will continue to hold strong in the face of resistance and rising hate.

With this new Strategic Plan *You Belong Here* we have set out our roadmap for the next three years – with the lives, rights and voice of LGBTQ+ youth at the core of what we do and how we do it.

The lived experiences and voices of LGBTQ+ young people are louder than ever with the growth of our Youth Advisory Panel and youth participation. We will continue to respond to the needs of the young people we work with; grow our range of unique projects, supports and groups; and expand our age range to meet the needs of young people from 10 years old. Within this plan, we have set an ambitious goal to secure a permanent home for young people in Dublin City Centre. In a post-pandemic world, with increased security threats, young people have told us that they need a safe, secure third space, where fun and connection go hand in hand.

Other notable developments in the Plan include expanding supports and resources for the families of LGBTQ+ youth, building on the capacity of professionals in social and healthcare settings and a focus on the dissemination of factual information based on our growing evidence base and research.

The plan was formed together with our stakeholders, reflective of how we work at Belong To – in partnership and collaboration. We wish to thank Caroline Gardener and Elaria Rossney from Quality Matters who shepherded us through the development of this Strategic Plan. We thank all those who offered their insights to shape this plan including funders, donors, Board of Directors, working group, volunteers, staff, partner organisations, teachers, youth workers, parents and, most importantly, young people themselves.

Over the next three years, we will continue to be there with and for LGBTQ+ young people. We look forward to bringing this plan to life and continuing to hold strong as we create an Ireland where LGBTQ+ youth are equal, safe, and thriving.

In Pride,



Patricia Carey (she/her)
Chairperson



Moninne Griffith (she/her)
CEO



We are Belong To — the national LGBTQ+ youth organisation.

Since 2003, Belong To has been supporting LGBTQ+ young people aged 14–23. We do this by providing safe and fun spaces for young people to meet, by providing individualised support with professionals such as youth workers and by supporting young people in groups, as well as education and by creating resources for LGBTQ+ youth. The goal is for any young person who gets in touch with Belong To to feel accepted, safe, and valued.

The two main places that young people spend time are in school and at home. Belong To runs programmes aimed at educators, schools, parents and carers so that important adults in young people's lives can understand and embrace their LGBTQ+ young people. Belong To also leads a national network of LGBTQ+ youth groups, supporting youth workers across Ireland to learn from each other and implement best practice. The organisation works alongside employers, health and social service organisations to help ensure they are doing the best they can for LGBTQ+ young people.

While Ireland has made significant progress in addressing systemic discrimination, this work is not yet done. Belong To works with the government and other allies to make the changes needed for Ireland to be a society that protects, values and celebrates LGBTQ+ young people – the goal that Belong To, their young people, and their allies and partners are working towards.

Our Vision

We see a world where LGBTQ+ young people are safe to shine and can confidently shape their own futures.

Our Mission

We work with and for LGBTQ+ young people to create a society where we all belong.

Our Values

Welcoming

We are mindful of people's wellbeing and strive for our spaces and interactions to be joyful and fun while ensuring they are safe and respectful.

Trustworthy

We are transparent in our work, how we operate and in our governance.

Rooted in experience

We work as equals with LGBTQ+ young people. What we say and do is informed by their lives, experiences, and the challenges they face.

Courageous

We challenge and speak out about the causes and effects of prejudice, discrimination, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia on LGBTQ+ young people and what must change.

Inclusive and diverse

We seek to create a sense of belonging and to reflect and include the diversity of LGBTQ+ young people, and we are mindful of intersectionality. We work in community and solidarity for human rights and social justice.

Strategic

We make deliberate choices about where we focus our work and energy to make maximum impact on where we lead and where we partner with others.



Achievements from *Sharing the Learning* Our 2022–2024 Strategic Plan

2,420 individuals were supported through the Dublin Youth Service.



Young people attended groups a total of **3,693** times.

604 groups and programmes were facilitated through the Dublin Youth Service.

95

LGBTQ+ youth groups were supported nationwide.



258 hours of crisis counselling were provided in partnership with Pieta.

We opened a new **Family Support Service.**



38 youth services and groups were involved in the Rainbow Awards.

2,000 young people and youth workers marched at Dublin Pride.



154 new schools joined the LGBTQ+ Quality Mark programme.

653,349 students were reached through the LGBTQ+ Quality Mark and Stand Up Awareness Week.



Raised a total of
€250,000 through
the Rainbow Ball.



12,533 professionals were trained to support LGBTQ+ youth.

3 new e-learning modules for LGBTQ+ youth launched.



Hosted two Camino fundraisers with 30 supporters raising €20,274.

Ran **nine fundraising appeals**, including Pride Appeals, Christmas Appeals, Tax Back Appeals, and Belong To's first ever Legacy Appeal.



An overall **17.2% increase** in social media following.

The **Trans Equality Together** coalition was established, alongside TENI and LGBT Ireland, with 35 members made up of civil society organisations.

429 community fundraisers held events to raise funds including Spill the Tea, Dublin and New York Marathons.

Launched a new website with 79,658 visitors that year.



1,208 voices were engaged through the School Climate Survey.

17 policy submissions were made to advocate for LGBTQ+ youth.



603 pieces of media coverage.



30 LGBTQ+ youth joined our first ever Youth Advisory Panel.

77% of post-primary schools in Ireland were reached through campaigns and advocacy efforts.



We won Charity Board of the Year twice at the Charity Excellence Awards.



107 dedicated volunteers were engaged, contributing 2,550+ volunteer hours.

Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland report published

in 2024 – the largest and most comprehensive study of the community in Ireland to date.

We achieved the CII

Triple Lock every year in recognition of our high standards in fundraising, financial reporting and governance.

20%

We grew our impact for LGBTQ+ young people by increasing our staff team by 20%.

We enhanced efficiencies in the organisation

with the introduction of new HR and project management systems and an updated CRM.

Theory of Change

What We Do

What's New

**Parents
and Family**

Individual support sessions

Referrals and information

Resources

Support groups

**LGBTQ+
Young People**

Youth groups and programmes for 14–23 years

Support youth work services around the country

Campaigns and youth information

Mental health supports

Stand Up Awareness Week

Expand youth work to 10–13 year olds

Innovative digital youth work

Youth leadership programmes

Professionals

Quality standards in education and youth work

Capacity building for educators and youth workers in post primary education and youth work

Research and advocacy

Quality standards in community, homeless and education services

Quality standards in primary education

Quality standards for employers

Capacity building for social social and healthcare professionals

What This Creates

The Result

Safe and supportive spaces where LGBTQ+ young people belong.

Supportive and confident parents and families.

Informed and competent professionals.

Youth participation in decision making.

Inclusive legislation and policy.

Young people feel safe, confident and well.

Celebration and validation of diverse identities.

Empowered youth who contribute to social change.

LGBTQ+ young people are safe to shine and can confidently shape their own futures

Setting the Scene

The process of developing this Strategic Plan took place between May and December in 2024. During the planning process, we examined challenges, opportunities, our database, and conducted an extensive consultation process. We brought groups together in-person and online a number of times to share their ideas, perspectives and insights. We spoke to our partner organisations, funders, politicians and policy makers, our team, Board of Directors, educators, youth workers, parents, and most importantly LGBTQ+ young people to ensure that this Plan reflects their perspectives.

Young People

The Covid-19 pandemic created long-lasting challenges for LGBTQ+ young people in Ireland, particularly around mental health. A 2020 *Belong To* study revealed that 97% of LGBTQ+ youth experienced issues such as anxiety, stress, and depression, reflecting a broader decline in mental wellbeing¹. We also know from the 2024 *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland* research that LGBTQI+ young people experience higher levels of stress, self-harm and suicidal ideation than the general youth population². Research also showed that young people across Ireland reduced their engagement with youth services, just when they needed it most. The National Youth Council of Ireland reported a 69% decrease in youth engagement, leaving 80,000 fewer young people connected to youth work since the pandemic's onset³. This change most affects young people who are more susceptible to challenges, such as LGBTQ+ young people, those from ethnic minority backgrounds or those who have other additional needs such as a disability or neurodiversity. Young people told us the solutions lie in continuing to provide inclusive spaces and innovating in the way youth services are delivered and how digital space is used. Research tells us that important and critical role LGBTQI+

community groups and support networks (family, friends, peers, work colleagues) play in supporting positive mental health amongst the community. In the *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland* report, 84% of participants felt that having a connection with the LGBTQI+ community through LGBTQI+ groups had a positive impact on their mental health, with 93% of participants rating making LGBTQI+ friends as also having a positive impact².

Their Families

Families of LGBTQ+ young people significantly influence their wellbeing and mental health. Many LGBTQ+ youth face varying degrees of acceptance from their families. Those in non-affirming households, experience much higher rates of loneliness, anxiety, self-harm and suicide⁴. There is a notable gap in resources for parents who want to learn how to support their LGBTQ+ children, alongside a spread of misinformation and fear surrounding LGBTQ+ identities. Research shows that families with cultural or religious beliefs opposing LGBTQ+ identities may have a harder time when a child comes out, contributing to poorer mental health outcomes for young people.⁵



To ensure that young people have the best chance, there is an urgent need to ensure that families have impartial and evidence-based information and guidance to help them accept and support their children.

The Places Where Young People Spend Time

LGBTQ+ young people increasingly spend time online. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated this trend, pushing many young people to rely on online platforms for interaction and support. Social media platforms and digital spaces can help young people share experiences and challenges related to their sexual orientation or gender identity, and foster a sense of belonging and acceptance that may be lacking in their offline lives. However, these environments can also present challenges, such as cyberbullying, hate and misinformation. Services need to be present in these environments to connect with young people and to help them safely navigate them. Additionally, LGBTQ+ young people need fun and engaging real-world spaces that help them connect offline. For Belong To, there is a real urgency to secure a permanent and secure place from which to operate our youth work services to serve LGBTQ+ young people in the wider Dublin community.

The Society Young People are Growing Up In

Fuelled by increased opposition to progressive social changes including LGBTQ+ rights and reproductive access, the rise of anti-democratic movements in Ireland and globally has significantly impacted the LGBTQ+ community. In Ireland, anti-democratic groups have drawn on public discontent following the Covid-19 pandemic to garner support and target marginalised communities, including LGBTQ+ individuals. The Global Project Against Hate and Extremism identified 12 anti-democratic groups in Ireland in 2020, which have been noted for their aggressive positions on LGBTQ+ issues⁶. Additionally, research from Dublin City University has linked algorithmic radicalisation on social media to this rise in extremism⁷. This content often portrays traditional family structures as threatened, attributing societal changes to LGBTQ+ rights and trans identities. Belong To has a role in providing young people with a safe place to be themselves. We also advocate for just and equal policies and laws and contribute to evidence-based unbiased and positive media depictions of LGBTQ+ life to ensure that LGBTQ+ young people are valued and equal in Irish society.

How we Prioritise What is Most Important

While great change has been made in some areas of LGBTQ+ rights, there are still many issues that need to be progressed.

Belong To's 2020 and 2021 studies conducted to investigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on LGBTQ+ young people presented concerning findings; 97% of respondents reported struggles with anxiety, stress and depression during the previous 12 months, compared to 93% in 2020^{1,8,9}. LGBTQ+ youth have a higher risk of poor mental health and well-being in comparison to their non-LGBTQ+ peers.

Research indicates that these outcomes are directly related to experiences of discrimination, victimisation, and rejection from their family, peers, and communities⁹. These issues attest to the fact that in Ireland we are not yet where we need to be. That means that as an organisation with limited resources we have had to make difficult decisions about what we can work on.

Our priority is doing things well when we do them, staying the course to attain change, and working on the things that will create the most change for young people.

To help make these decisions we asked young people what they wanted. We then brought young people together with policymakers, parents, partner organisations and staff to discuss emerging themes. We also looked at new responses and trends internationally to make sure we remain open and innovative. Our teams then worked together to understand where Belong To could make the most difference. In all cases, we discussed where we could partner with others to extend our impact.

The final plan outlines how we will build on our significant organisational strengths to provide high-quality responses. We will focus on embedding the innovations from our last strategic plan as well as taking some measured risks in order to create real and impactful change.

We look forward to working with you on this journey.

Our Strategic Goals



1

Goal 1

Provide innovative, responsive youth work that supports LGBTQ+ young people to be equal, safe and thriving, and assist other youth services to do the same.



2

Goal 2

Create spaces so every young person feels safe and supported in their communities.



3

Goal 3

Drive change and equality through advocacy, research and campaigns.



4

Goal 4

Invest in our people, systems and sustainability to achieve our vision.





1 **Strategic Goal 1:** Provide innovative, responsive youth work that supports LGBTQ+ young people to be equal, safe and thriving, and assist other youth services to do the same.

Since the pandemic, youth services across Ireland have experienced a decline in youth participation. Belong To listens to young people and through this, has identified a number of ways to rebuild young people's engagement and address gaps in services.

A key gap identified is support for young people aged 10–13 who are exploring their LGBTQ+ identity. A need for a safe weekend space for older youth has also been identified. To respond, we will open a group for 10- to 13-year-olds, reintroduce Belong To Sundays, and innovate in how we do weekly youth work. We will trial digital youth work and run new targeted media campaigns, all while continuing to offer support services. These efforts aim to create fun and meaningful youth groups, enhance access to inclusive services and support the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth, in close collaboration with them.

Strategic Objectives

Double the number of young people benefitting from Belong To's direct youth work.

We will do this by; expanding our age range to 10- to 23-year-olds, reintroducing Belong To Sundays, reimagining our groups, activities and programmes – including harm reduction and sexual health programmes, providing a range of one-to-one supports, and assessing the changes we make for young people's mental health and wellbeing.

Engage isolated young people through an Innovative digital youth work pilot.

This programme will reach isolated LGBTQ+ young people through the innovative use of technology. We will support their mental health and wellbeing through creating connection and community.

Support the development of more LGBTQ+ inclusive spaces with youth services across Ireland.

We will do this collaboratively through sustaining and growing the National Network to deliver targeted, good practice LGBTQ+ youth work and, through programmes such as the Rainbow Award, we will empower youth services to become inclusive and welcoming spaces for LGBTQ+ young people.

Secure a permanent LGBTQ+ inclusive youth hub in Dublin with an integrated model of service delivery.

To provide the best services for young people, we need sufficient space and security. Now is the time to progress this. We aim to raise funds to establish a permanent space for youth that is LGBTQ+ friendly and serves as a safe space for all young people in Dublin and beyond.

Run targeted media campaigns to engage and inform young people on topics including mental health and wellbeing, their rights and staying safe online.

We will provide education and information to LGBTQ+ youth about key topics relating to our mission across a range of digital media platforms.

Improve the mental health of LGBTQ+ young people.

In addition to our direct youth work and programme work, we will do this by offering affordable counselling and direct one-to-one supports for a range of mental health and wellbeing issues. We will also share knowledge, build partnerships, and collaborate with mental health professionals and services.

2 Strategic Goal 2:

Create spaces so every young person feels safe and supported in their communities.

We are dedicated to making education more inclusive for LGBTQ+ youth by partnering with key stakeholders to share good practices, develop quality standards, and train educators.

We also support parents and carers through one-to-one help, peer groups, and resources for creating safe and supportive home environments. In the workplace, we will explore and then develop a programme to ensure LGBTQ+ youth feel supported by equipping employers with tools to foster

inclusive environments. Additionally, we will work with social, health, and community services to share best practices and improve support for LGBTQ+ youth across sectors such as homelessness, drug services, and family support.

Strategic Objectives

Support the development of LGBTQ+ inclusive education spaces.

We work in partnership with key education stakeholders in primary, second level and further education to collate and share good practice, develop a quality standards framework and build capacity among professionals working with LGBTQ+ youth.

Support parents, guardians and carers to create safe, nurturing home environments.

We provide one-to-one supports, and will establish peer support groups, and develop and disseminate a range of good practice information resources.

Equip employers to welcome and support young LGBTQ+ people in the workforce.

We work in partnership with employers to develop guidance and supports to ensure LGBTQ+ youth can be out and proud at work.

Support the development of LGBTQ+ inclusive social, health and community services.

We work in partnership with social, health and community services to develop guidance and supports for professionals working with LGBTQ+ youth.

3

Strategic Goal 3

Drive change and equality through advocacy, research and campaigns.

We empower young LGBTQ+ activists to drive positive social change through our youth participation model, while building trust as a source of factual information and services that reflect young people’s needs and lives.

We will raise public awareness through media, digital platforms, and campaigns on key LGBTQ+ issues. Additionally, we will advocate for laws and policies that protect LGBTQ+ youth, focusing on

non-discrimination, bullying prevention, healthcare access, and safe spaces. We will also conduct research to deepen understanding of LGBTQ+ youth experiences and improve services based on evidence.

Strategic Objectives

Empower young LGBTQ+ activists to change their worlds.

Through youth participation and engagement, we empower LGBTQ+ youth to be agents for positive social change.

Sustain and enhance Belong To’s reputation as the national LGBTQ+ youth organisation and a trusted source of factual information.

Through media engagement, digital media and campaigns, we promote public awareness about issues and policies relevant to LGBTQ+ young people.

Campaign for laws, policy, legislation, and national strategies that protect the rights of LGBTQ+ youth.

Through advocacy, we ensure that LGBTQ+ young peoples’ voices are heard and that their lives are reflected in policies, legislation, and national strategies.

Conduct high-quality research to better understand and improve the lives of LGBTQ+ young people.

We will grow our evidence base to inform public knowledge, policy and practice about the lived experience of LGBTQ+ youth with academic partners.

4 Strategic Goal 4: Invest in our people, systems and sustainability to achieve our vision.

We will focus on developing staff skills and wellbeing through a learning and development programme aligned with performance goals, alongside a dedicated programme to support line managers.

We will also enhance our impact by expanding volunteering opportunities. We aim to strengthen our organisation by improving systems, adopting new technologies, prioritising staff wellbeing, and maintaining

excellence in governance. To support our mission, we will expand fundraising efforts and ensure ongoing compliance with legal obligations and best practices in charity governance.

Strategic Objectives

Develop staff competencies and effectiveness. We will continue to invest in our people to best deliver for LGBTQ+ youth.

Grow volunteering across the organisation. We will develop and implement a comprehensive volunteering programme to support and enhance all areas of Belong To's work.

Support staff wellbeing. We recognise the challenges that our team face in the current climate and therefore prioritise staff wellbeing. We understand that only through their effort and expertise can we fulfil our mission.

Be accountable and transparent through good governance and financial management. Belong To will continue to meet the highest standards in our policies and practices, and be fully compliant with legal obligations and the Governance Code. We will ensure financial sustainability and effective management of resources.

Enhance operational efficiency and effectiveness. Through continued improvements to our systems and processes we will strengthen Belong To as an organisation and enhance our impact.

Ensure a sustainable income to achieve our ambitious goals for the next three years and beyond.

We will continue to maximise our fundraising and state income.

Enhance our environmental sustainability and ethical business practices. Belong To will become one of the first charities in Ireland to use the Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) framework to assess the organisation's business practices and performance in various sustainability and ethical areas, and will develop a multi-year strategy with defined targets to ensure we enhance our environmental and ethical practices.

Funded by



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



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I first went to Belong To when I was 16. I will never forget my amazement at walking in the door and meeting all these friendly people. I felt I didn't have to hide, justify, or explain myself.

Lucy (She/Her), 18



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